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By-Bernabei, Raymond

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This 3-year longitudinal study is exploring readiness skills of children between 5 and 8 years of age and proposes a design for curriculum development. In this study, generalized concepts, visual-motor triordination, visual and auditory discrimination, visual and auditory memory (imagery), and oral language usage, are identified in order to categorize learning behaviors. Behavioral indicators for readiness skills are matched to skills for reading achievement, perception, recall, word analysis, comprehension, and transference. Commercial materials and specially prepared materials are developed into a conceptual design for curriculum development. A child is guided into a personalized learning program, his progress is assessed, and he is placed for the coming year according to his readiness to learn. Evaluation of the program after 1 year indicates significant differences in readiness skills between the interim class and normal classes. (DO)

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AN EVALUATION OF THE INTERIM CLASS: AN EXTENDED READINESS PROGRAM

By

Dr. Raymond Bernabei
Assistant County Superintendent,
Curriculum & Instruction Division
Bucks County Public Schools
Doylestown, Pennsylvania
18901

PS001680

In Cooperation With:

Mrs. Ann Melby, Classroom Teacher
New Hope-Solebury School District
New Hope, Pennsylvania

Mrs. Annette Guenther, Language Arts Consultant
Bucks County Public Schools
Doylestown, Pennsylvania

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Introduction

Reading Readiness can be viewed in the context of the "nature-nurture" controversy which is a part of the larger debate about the essence of human intellectual development. Although interest in and theories of intellectual development are as old as man, the views we will be concerned with are those expressed by Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner. "We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development".[1] This sweeping statement by Bruner presents an exciting challenge to education. A corollary to this hypothesis, "that there is an appropriate version of any skill or knowledge that may be emparted at whatever age one wishes to begin teaching -- however preparatory the version may be,"[2] would suggest that the logical way to approach the learning and the teaching situation is to understand and to present the structure and "the psychology of the subject matter."[3]

Duckworth[4] a follower of Piaget expresses the opposing view when he states, "He (Piaget) is understood to be saying something like this: Children go through certain stages of intellectual development from birth through adolescence. These stages materialize, fully constructed, when their time has come, and

there is little we can do to advance them." The stages[5] referred to, are sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete operations, and formal operations. The second part of this interpretation is apparently derived from Piaget's description of the transitions from one stage to another. The factors involved are maturation, experience, social transmission, and equilibration which Piaget considers to be the fundamental factor.[6] Whether this concope of Piaget's work is correct could be argued, but from a practical point of view, the interpretation does exist and presents a real controversy, particularly in the field of early childhood education. Piaget recognized the controversy when he said,"A few years ago Bruner made a claim which has always astounded me; namely, that you can teach anything in an intellectually honest way to any child if you go about it in the right way." He further states"... I have a hypothesis that I am so far incapable of proving: Probably the organization of operations has an optimal time...".[7] The basic question would seem to be, is readiness a function of time to grow and develop or a function of training and experience? Apparently Piaget would consider it a function of time. Bruner on the other hand states, "It (readiness) is a half-truth largely because it turns out that one teaches readiness or pro-

vides opportunities for its nurture, one does not simply wait for it."[8] We have then what educators call the nature-nurture controversy. On one extreme we have those who seem to be saying "Touch not the little children", on the other extreme, the Whitly School in Connecticut[9] which demonstrates how three and four year olds can learn to read and write using Montessori materials.

Large amounts of time, money and talent are expended in the American School System to educate our youth, including the children of concern in this report namely those in the 5 to 8 years age bracket. In view of the above expenditures, plus the desire to give our children the best possible learning opportunities, it becomes highly desirable to demonstrate which theory if either, is correct. If the concepts of Bruner are correct, we may do well to expend more money to start formal education at an even lower level; say 3 or 4. The activity to look at would be the first formal educational enterprise, namely reading and the concept of reading "readiness."

Extended Reading Readiness

Recognizing that a resolution to the "nature-nurture" controversy will of necessity take time, and also recognizing that in the interim we will have children who are failing in school because of reading difficulties; practical considerations and moral obligations to the children make it imperative that we

establish and operate with the best program that we envision. Considering the available background materials for both schools of thought it appears that an eclectic approach is the most promising. Thus, the concept of an Extended Reading Readiness Program arises in contrast with the traditional Reading Readiness Program. The traditional program can be extended in intensity, and time, either singularly or in combination, however the fusion of the nature-nurture positions necessitates that the extension include time. With this in mind, an Extended Reading Readiness Program is defined as one that provides for an organized readiness program which treats the student for a period of time longer than the standard Kindergarten treatment.

Extended readiness may be regarded as a period during which conditions affecting learning are favorable for effective performance. A child may be capable, mentally, for learning, but not ready to learn. He can be intellectually mature, yet be unable to succeed due to a visual, auditory, or language difficulty, or some physical problem. A deficiency in one area can cause frustration for the child who may be ready in others. Learning involves the total development, the total personality of an individual; therefore, the child must be ready physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and psychologically.

It is essential for the teacher to recognize that children develop

at individual rates and, therefore, will not be ready for the same tasks at the same time. Readiness for learning is related to each child's individual background of experiences and background of information from which he develops his speaking vocabulary and builds working concepts to understand what is said or read to him, and later, what he reads for himself.

The teacher, then, should know as much as possible about the readiness level of each child for each step in the learning process. With each learning-task related to pre-established objectives, it is necessary to be aware of the readiness of the child for each experience before he is asked to attempt it. Readiness cannot be a hurried process, for each child has his own unique rate of growth and learning style, but it might be expedited through properly executed learning-experiences.

Procedure

In this study, generalized concepts; visual-motor triordination, visual and auditory discrimination; visual and auditory memory (imagery); oral-language useage; are identified for the purpose of categorizing learning behaviors (behavioral indicators).

These indicators for readiness skills are then matched to the skills necessary for reading achievement: perception; recall; word analysis; comprehension; transference.

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Sequential objectives are then written in behavioral terms. Pupil learning-experiences are devised and related to each behavioral objective. By this process, one could easily determine the learning modalities: visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. Commercial materials are then analyzed for their appropriateness to the learning mode, behavioral objective, and generalized concept. In addition, personally prepared materials are developed related to a curriculum which includes:

1. Visual Motor readiness
   a. Visual training
   b. Eye-hand coordination
   c. Directionality
2. Visual Memory activities
   a. Activities involving remembering sequence in patterns, colors, letters, words.
   b. Relating likes-differences from concrete to abstract
   c. Recall of experiences in sequence.
3. Auditory Memory Activities
   a. Recall of spoken directions
   b. Sounds in general
   c. Sounds specifically related to phonics
4. Mathematics
   a. Cuisinaire system of concrete experiences with basic mathematics.
   b. Relating cuisinaire activities to numerals
5. Language
   a. Opportunity for conversation
   b. Shared experiences
   c. Emphasis on language as a tool.

1. Describing
2. Asking questions
3. Giving directions
4. Listening to others
5. Sharing literature by listening to or acting out stories

6. Social Behavior
   a. Acceptance of individuals
   b. Sharing
   c. Cooperation in group work
   d. Stability through consistent discipline and routine
   e. Planning as a group
   f. Planning as individuals
   g. Consideration for others
7. Extending Interests
   a. Social Studies
   b. Science
   c. Arts and Crafts
   d. Vocal music
8. Body in Space Perception
   a. Physical training
   b. Exercises geared to developmental needs
   c. Rhythm

This conceptual design for curriculum development could provide evidence of learning outcomes through its application. Once the teacher conceives of the whole curriculum, she can then record systematically, the necessary information in assessing each child on a learning continuum. That is, once the concepts are identified, the behavioral objectives written in terms relating to each concept, the learning experiences for the pupils devised, the media(both book and non-book) analyzed and identified for relevancy to accomplishing the objective, the teacher now can become

more precise in guiding each child into a personalized learning program.

The assessment procedure becomes process-content oriented utilizing teacher observations. These observations become the basis in determining the relative standard for each child's readiness to learn.

Following the completion of one year in the readiness class, an evaluation conference is held to determine placement for the coming year; but if during the year the child's progress makes him ready for the first grade, he will be so placed and be given a gradual introduction to first grade work. Also, if a first grade child is judged to need further readiness activities during the year, he may be placed in the transition class to receive the needed activities.

Findings

Although this study is exploratory in nature and longitudinal (3 years) in design, the preliminary findings indicate significant differences in readiness skills between the interim class and normal classes. The findings for the second year of this study will be available in August, 1969. By 1970, it is anticipated that results relative to reading achievement will support substantially the worth of this study.

1. Bruner, Jerome S., The Process of Education, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) page 33.

2. Bruner, Jerome S., Toward A Theory of Instruction, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966) page 35.

3. Ibid, page 154.

4. Duckworth, Eleanor, "Piaget Rediscovered", Journal of Research in Science Teaching, Volume 2, 155 issue 3, page 172.

5. Jennings, Frank, "Jean Piaget: Notes on Learning" Saturday Review, May 20, 1968, page 82.

6. Almy, Millie, et al, Young Children's Thinking, Studies of Some Aspects of Piaget's Theory, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, N.Y. 1966, page 20.

7. Notes on Learning, op. cit., page 29.

8. Process of Education, op. cit., page 29.

9. O. Burke, "Whitby School", Jubilee, V I February 1959, pages 21 - 27